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Mystery Professor Is Still an Enigma to Many

By DOROTHY J. GAITER

When prosecutors in Pennsylvania face Paul Arthur Crafton in court today, a month and a half after his arrest, they will still not have any idea why he may have used two aliases to teach simultaneously at two colleges. Nor will they know why he had credit cards and international correspondence in a dozen names — nor who he is, really, beyond some superficial facts.

Mr. Crafton, 59 years old, is also an enigma to his colleagues at George Washington University, although he has taught there for 26 years, and to his neighbors in Regency Estates in Potomac, Md., where he has lived for 20 years in a large, rambling house obscured by evergreen trees.

"Our energies are concentrated on finding out what was his motive," LeRoy S. Zimmerman, the Pennsylvania Attorney General, said recently. "We have credit cards, minor transactions on those credit cards literally around the world, but no evidence of anything beyond that at this time."

The authorities say Mr. Crafton taught at seven universities and colleges, including Wagner College on Staten Island, and had applied to 22 others, using various names, since 1978. For several months until his arrest March 21 he taught simultaneously at George Washington University in Washington and Shippensburg and Millersville State Colleges in Pennsylvania, investigators said.

Second Hearing Set for May 26

Mr. Crafton has pleaded not guilty to 27 counts of theft by deception, tampering with public records, forgery and false swearing in connection with his teaching in Pennsylvania. He was freed on \$100,000 bail. Today's court date is for a preliminary hearing on the Shippensburg charges. A hearing on the Millersville charges is set for May 26.

Another aspect of Mr. Crafton's career came to light with the disclosure by Norman S. Klein, a Miami Beach lawyer, that the professor had sought financing over a period of several years for a series of inventions, none of which came to fruition. The inventions included a device to read utility meters by remote control and a method of verifying credit cards.

"As far as I know, no one was defrauded," Mr. Klein said yesterday in a telephone interview. "The investors knew they were taking a high risk, and they were able to afford it."

Investigators say that in Mr. Crafton's apartment in Lancaster County they found 16 boxes containing papers establishing 34 identities. They also found foreign currencies, academic credentials from several foreign universities and international correspondence under various letterheads concerning the sale of banks, oil and art.

At George Washington, most of his students thought well of him, but he avoided social engagements with colleagues. At other colleges, professors and students called him aloof, strict, inaccessible and incompetent.

"He wasn't around much," said James McCoy, a mathematics professor at Wagner College. "I guess now I understand why."

Mr. Crafton spoke with a British accent at the other colleges, but not at George Washington. He almost always wore navy blue polyester trousers and a white shirt. He held his right arm close to his body as though he could not raise it, and he carried a cane.

His parents were Rumanian immigrants and he was born in New York City. He received a Ph.D in engineering from the University of Maryland in 1956. His name was legally changed from Cohen in 1944. He and his wife, Sonia, have two children, Eric, 20, a college student, and Laura Melanie, 17, who has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair.

Jeanne Glennie has lived four houses down from the Craftons for 20 years, yet she says she has only seen Mr. Crafton three times. "They were always busy with their daughter," she said. "No one knew them much."

Laura's need for her father's care and her costly medical treatments are expected to play a part in his defense. She has had several operations in hospitals abroad, according to Mr. Crafton's

attorney, John F. Pyfer Jr.

He characterized his client as a devoted father and husband who built "a lot of contraptions, ramps in and around the house" to help Laura get around.

Mr. Crafton has also patented several inventions, including a tunnel-drilling process. He worked at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington on secret military equipment for 25 years.

"Was he a spy? That seems to be a natural question to pop into the minds of those who watch the bizarre goings-on in Washington," said Patrick Boyle, a spokesman for Attorney General William French Smith. "But there's been nothing to suggest that he was a spy, either for a foreign country or even for this country."

In 1975, Mr. Crafton was censured by the faculty and removed as chairman of George Washington University's engineering department because he had supervised the work of a doctoral student and granted her a degree all on his own.

His salary at George Washington was cut to \$15,000 this semester because he was working part time. He earned \$29,500 at Shippensburg and \$28,000 at Millersville. The university put him on administrative leave with pay after his arrest, and has begun a procedure that could end in his dismissal.

"When things like this occur, the general public tends to stand back and to stand in certain admiration of people who manage to do this," said Dr. Keith Lovin, provost at Millersville State College. "But it's serious. Academic fraud is wrong. It cannot be condoned."